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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA AND NEA/IPA

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TAGS: [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [KISL](#) [IS](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: AMMAN FATHAWIS DISCUSS GAZA EFFECTS ON MOVEMENT
AND NEXT STEPS

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Fatah members resident in Amman agreed that their movement was in dire straits following recent Israeli operations in Gaza. Aside from the perennial plea for quick movement on the peace process, our contacts varyingly saw potential Fatah salvation in convening the long-delayed Sixth Fatah Party Congress, holding parliamentary elections throughout the Territories, and making sure any Gaza reconstruction aid was not channeled through Hamas. Few saw the need for a Palestinian unity government or any other steps that tacitly or explicitly acknowledged Hamas political gains. End Summary.

Fatah Upstaged and Weakened Here and In the Territories

¶2. (C) During and after the Israeli operation in Gaza, PolOff met with a number of Fatah contacts to seek their views on the state of the movement. Some felt that whatever damage was done to Fatah by the Gaza crisis, it was only the latest in a string of perceived failures and shortcomings. Most vitriolic in this regard was Mahmoud Natour (Abu Al-Tayyeb), a member of the Fatah Revolutionary Council and commander of Force 17 under Yasir Arafat. He directed his ire at Israel, but also at PA President and Fatah/PLO leader Mahmoud Abbas. He argued that Fatah can only be helped if the security forces are strengthened, checkpoints are lifted, and settlements are stopped. As far as he was concerned, however, Abbas was a lost cause with no popular support. He compared the PA President unfavorably to PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, whom he saw as less corrupt.

¶3. (C) Hamadeh Faraneh, a former Jordanian MP and a member of the Palestine National Council (PNC), argued that Fatah was always at a disadvantage in Jordan because it had agreed to General Intelligence Department-mandated restrictions on its political and administrative activities. As a result, it lacked the resources to stage demonstrations in Jordan to counter the anti-Abbas and anti-Egypt slogans that marked many of the protests here. He and other Fatah colleagues donated personal funds to defray some of the costs of the limited number of demonstrations that took a different tone. He linked Fatah's fate to the outcome of the Gaza crisis saying it depended on whether Israel significantly damaged Hamas and weakened its credibility.

¶4. (C) Faraneh doubted that was in the cards, however, saying: "right now, the blow is against the Palestinian people, not Hamas. If Hamas wins, Fatah will lose, Gaza will be the capital of Palestine." If Hamas won, Faraneh predicted, the PLO would have to go hat-in-hand to Hamas, rather than the other way around, as it sought to maintain primacy the Palestinian national movement. Issa Al-Shuaibi, the Amman pointman for chief Palestinian negotiator Ahmad Qurei (Abu Ala), spoke to PolOff as the fighting still raged. "If Hamas wins," he warned, "it will all be over for Fatah."

Shuaibi defined a Hamas "defeat" as accepting the Egyptian cease-fire initiative without conditions, and the killing of significant numbers of the Hamas leadership.

After the Fighting, Some Cling to Hope

15. (C) Contacted two weeks after major Gaza operations ended without a formal cease-fire, Shuaibi admitted that Hamas had not suffered the defeat he had hoped for, but added that the jury was still out on the ultimate political impact. Shuaibi felt there was still time to turn the tide against Hamas by preventing any reconstruction (but not the transit of humanitarian aid) from happening in Gaza without being under an international, Arab, or PA umbrella to ensure that Hamas abides by the Quartet's conditions, and to make sure the region's moderates continued to support the PLO and the PA.

16. (C) In the West Bank, where Shuaibi travels regularly and has contacts in the PA leadership, Fatah faced an angry and emotional public that was not suffering the consequences of the Israeli bombardment but was drawn to Hamas for having stood up to the "occupier" in Gaza. But in Gaza, he said, Hamas faced a potential public backlash. He recounted a recent phone conversation between Abu Ala and the Mayor of Gaza City in which the latter cursed Hamas. He also portrayed Hamas's call for an alternative to the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians and Hamas leader Khaled Mish'al's praise for Iran as political blunders that would likely undo some of Hamas's gains. Meanwhile, Shuaibi noted that there was renewed enthusiasm in the Fatah leadership to hold its long-delayed Sixth Party Congress, and

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that Abu Ala was in Amman for a preparatory meeting.

17. (C) PNC member and former Fathawi Ghazi Al-Sa'adi said he had no doubt that Fatah was a big loser, having nothing to show the Palestinian and Arab publics for its years of negotiations with Israel. Like Shuaibi, however, he thought that if elections were held in the Palestinian territories, Fatah might actually do better than expected in Gaza (if also potentially worse in the West Bank). Key for this, however, would be movement on the peace process front that demonstrated Fatah's moderation could pay dividends. Fathi Alwan, Political Counselor at the PLO's Embassy in Amman, would not bite on the question of how the Gaza events impacted Fatah, arguing that Fatah and the PLO's legitimacy transcended intra-Palestinian rivalry. He said Abbas favored new elections in the Palestinian areas and anticipated that Fatah would come out on top, particularly because a new 100 percent party list-style voting regime would be in place that worked in its favor.

Must Fatah Reconcile With Hamas?

18. (C) Ibrahim Abu Ayyash, a Fatah-affiliated member of the PNC offered his view that Hamas had "achieved nothing, stayed in their holes, and only women and children suffered," and added that "Hamas is worse than Israel, for the future." Despite his harsh criticism of Hamas, however, he felt it had been foolish for Fatah and PA leaders to publicly criticize Hamas during the recent violence. "They should have kept the focus on the 'occupier.'" For the moment, Hamas has gained popular legitimacy with people on the Arab street - including in the Territories and Amman - which sees Hamas as having been granted a "god given victory." As a result of the Israeli "massacres" and the PA stance during the fighting, Fatah has grown weak and isolated. According to Abu Ayyash, Abu Ala told him that "we are humiliated."

19. (C) Abu Ayyash prescribed two steps for Fatah to regain its footing. The party, now more than ever, must get its own house in order and hold the Sixth Fatah Party Congress to elect new members and leaders. Abbas realizes this, having

earlier failed to take the planning process seriously. Secondly, reconciliation must take place and Hamas needs to be brought into the PA. "The only way out is a unity government. Abbas cannot continue with peace negotiations without Palestinian unity. It is a prerequisite," concluded Abu Ayyash. This, he thought, would allow for holding presidential and legislative elections, in which Fatah might be able to reverse the Hamas victory in 2006.

¶10. (C) Comment: While some of our contacts expressed hope that the tide can be turned in Fatah's favor, many evinced palpable wishful thinking. Others were simply resigned to Fatah's weakness. In the midst of the crisis, commentator Oraib Rantawi told PolOff how his Fatah friends in Amman felt marginalized by the conflict - the first in which neither Fatah nor the PLO were leading the charge. "Look to the demonstrations, you don't even find a picture of Arafat or Abu Jihad, let alone Abbas." Per Rantawi, some Fathawis here boycotted the demonstrations because they were marked by anger at Abbas for his criticism of Hamas; others joined in, arguing that Abbas no longer represented them. While Fatah has been losing standing for some time, the latest developments were a high-water mark for its unpopularity, he concluded. End Comment.

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